DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 096 EA 026 775

AUTHOR McArthur, Edith; And Others
TITLE Use of School Choice. Education Policy Issues: Statistical Perspectives.
INSTITUTION Policy Studies Associates, Inc., Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO NCES-95-742
PUB DATE May 95
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; National Surveys; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent Influence; Private Schools; Public Schools; Satisfaction; *School Choice

ABSTRACT

Since the late 1980s, school choice has become a popular education reform strategy. This document presents findings of the National Household Education Survey 1993 (NHES:93), a survey of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that provides national data on school choice. The survey asked parents of children in grades 3-12 who were over 8 years old whether their child attended a private or a public school and whether that school was a "regularly assigned" school or a "chosen" school. The data show that in 1993, almost one-fifth of children attended schools other than their assigned public schools. Black students were more likely than white students to attend a school selected by their families (23 percent compared to 19 percent). Parents primarily gave academic reasons for selecting the schools attended by their children. Among those who chose a public school the next most important reason was convenience; among those who selected a private school it was religious/moral reasons. Overall, 80 percent of parents (assigned and chosen) had positive perceptions of their children's schools. Among those parents whose children attended private schools, over 90 percent had positive perceptions. Parents with more education and incomes were more likely to send their children to private schools; children in urban areas were more likely than students in nonurban areas to attend a public school chosen by their parents. Two tables are included. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

EA

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

ED 384 096

EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES: STATISTICAL PERSPECTIVES

USE OF SCHOOL CHOICE

May 1995

The NCES Education Policy Issues series is designed to provide the best statistical information available on important policy questions. The series primarily provides responses grounded in statistical findings, but also, as appropriate, provides some information based on smaller scale research and case studies.

Introduction

Since the late 1980's, school choice has become a popular education reform strategy. Proponents believe that allowing parents to choose a school for their child promotes greater parental involvement in education. They also argue that the competition for students forces schools to improve to retain their current students and to attract new students. Choice opponents argue that less desirable schools will neither improve nor close due to lack of resources, but that students in those schools will have access to fewer resources than before.

The National Household Education Survey 1993 (NHES:93), a survey of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), provides these national data on school choice. The survey asked parents of children in grades 3-12 who were over 8 years old whether their child attended a private school or a public school that was their "regularly assigned" school or a "chosen" school. A small number of parents volunteered that their assigned school was their school of choice (1.2 percent). In this brief, these parents, as well as those whose child attended a private school or a chosen public school, were considered to have chosen their child's school.[1]

What are the characteristics of families who choose schools?

In 1993, 19 percent of children attended schools their families selected–11 percent in chosen public schools and 8 percent in private schools (table 1).[2] Black students (23 percent) were more likely than white students (19 percent) to have their families exercise the option to choose a school other than the assigned public school.[3] Moreover, the nature of the choices differed–black and Hispanic students were more likely to be in a chosen public school and less likely to be in a private school while white students were more likely to be in a private school than in a chosen public school.

Children living in urbanized areas were twice as likely as those not in urbanized areas to be in a school chosen by their families (25 percent to 12 percent). Among those whose parents chose their school, students in urbanized areas were somewhat more likely to be in public schools than in private schools while students outside urbanized areas were about equally likely to be in either type of chosen school. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Students in grades 3 to 12 attending a chosen or assigned school by family characteristics: 1993

	Total Number of Students	Percent Distribution: Public, Assigned	Public, Chosen	Private
Total Students	59,004,955	81%	11	8
Race/Ethnicity				
White	41,039,023	82%	8	10
Black	9,332,499	76%	20	4
Hispanic	6,557,854	80%	14	6
Type of area				
Inside urban area	35,080,073	75%	14	11
Outside urban area	8,692,522	88%	7	5
Rural	15,232,361	88%	6	6
Parent Education				
<H.S.	5,549,763	85%	13	2
H.S. grad	19,196,779	84%	11	5
Vo-Tech	18,536,028	81%	11	8
College grad	6,940,164	77%	10	13
Graduate school	8,578,628	75%	9	16
Parent Income				
< $15,000	12,848,325	82%	15	3
$15-30,000	15,106,627	82%	12	6
$30-50,000	15,915,309	82%	10	9
$50,000 +	15,132,694	77%	8	15

Students from households with incomes over $50,000 were more likely to be in a chosen school than other students. Income also was related to the type of chosen school students attended–when household income was over $50,000, private schools were chosen more often than public schools; the reverse was true when household income was $30,000 or under. Similarly, children of parents with higher levels of education were more likely to be in a chosen school than other children. When at least one parent has any postsecondary education, 20 percent or more of students were in a chosen school compared to approximately 15 percent of students whose parents had no postsecondary education. As parental education levels increased, students were more likely to be in a private school.

[1] Although not included in this analysis of school choice, in a separate question in the NHES:93, 47 percent of parents responded that their choice of where they live now was influenced by where their child would go to school.

[2] The percentage of students in grades 3 to 12 attending private schools reported by parents in the NHES (8 percent) differs from that reported by schools in the Schools and Staffing Survey (9.8 percent). Between the two surveys there were significant differences in survey methodology and respondent population. For further information please request the technical documentation.

[3] Due to rounding these percentages differ from those shown in the table.

EA 026 775

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

What are parents' primary reasons for choosing a school?

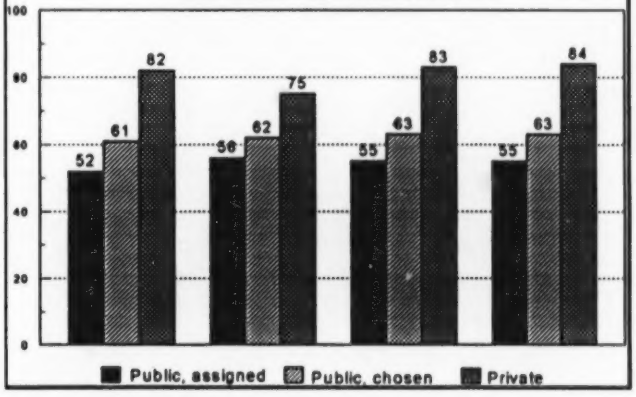
Overall, parents who choose public schools for their children do so for three reasons--a better academic environment (26 percent), special academic courses (23 percent), and school convenience (23 percent).[4] Parents with lower socio-economic status were more likely to select schools for convenience than families with higher socio-economic status (28 percent compared to 16 percent), while similar proportions of both populations chose schools for the two academic reasons.[5] These findings are consistent with findings from other more localized studies such as a recent Minnesota study (Rubenstein et al.).

Parents who enrolled their children in private schools did so for two reasons--a better academic program (37 percent) and religious/moral reasons (30 percent). These were the top two reasons across all population groups shown in Table 1. The other main reasons cited by families who chose public schools received little mention from families who chose private schools--only 10 percent cited special courses and 2 percent cited convenience. These findings mirror those of an earlier national study of school choice (Williams et al.).

Do parents' perceptions of their schools differ when they choose a school for their child?

Overall, parents who chose schools are more likely than parents who did not to be satisfied with the school their children attend. This was particularly true for parents who chose private schools. Eighty-two percent of private-school parents and 61 percent of parents who chose a public school said they were "very satisfied" with the schools their child attended, compared with 52 percent for parents with a child in the assigned public school. Similar patterns were seen for parents' level of satisfaction with their child's teachers, the school's academic standards, and the school's discipline policy (figure 1).

Figure 1:
Percentage of parents of students in grades 3-12 who are "very satisfied" with aspects of their child's school by school type:1993



[4] Parents who reported that the assigned school was the school of choice were not asked their reasons for choosing a school.

[5] The authors created a socio-economic status measure which is a composite of parents' educational attainment and household income. On average, lower socio-economic status families had income of $30,000 or less and parental educational attainment of high school diploma or less.

Parents' perceptions of the schools also were related to the type of school their child attended. While over 80 percent of parents with children in the assigned public school and parents with children in chosen public schools had positive perceptions about various school attributes, parents with children in private schools were most likely to have positive perceptions (over 90 percent on each measure). Private school parents were most likely to agree that the student is challenged in school, the principal and teachers maintain discipline, and the students and teachers respect each other (table 2). Parents who chose a public school generally agreed more often than those with children in an assigned school that their child enjoys school, teachers maintain discipline, and students and teachers respect each other.

Table 2: Parents' perceptions of the schools their children attend by type of school: 1993 (children in grades 3 to 12)

Agree or strongly agree that:	Public, Assigned	Public, Chosen	Private
Child challenged at school	83%	85%	97%
Child enjoys school	87	91	94
Teachers maintain discipline	89	92	98
Students and teachers respect each other	86	90	98
Principal maintains discipline	91	93	98

Discussion

While a number of questions regarding school choice remain to be answered, the following findings are important:

- In 1993, almost one-fifth of children attended schools other than their assigned public school.
- Black students were more likely than white students to attend a school selected by their families (23 percent compared to 19 percent).
- The primary reasons cited by parents for selecting the school attended by their child were academic. Among those who chose a public school, the next most important reason was convenience; among those who selected a private school, it was religious/moral reasons.
- Overall, over 80 percent of parents had positive perceptions of the schools their children attended. Among those parents whose children attended private schools, over 90 percent had positive perceptions.

Rubenstein, M.C., Hamar, R., & Adelman, N.E. (1992) Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

Williams, M.F., Hancher, K.S., & Hutner, A. (1983) Parents and School Choice: A Household Survey. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

This brief was prepared by Edith McArthur, NCES, Kelly W. Colopy, Policy Studies Associates, and Beth Schlaline, Pinkerton Computer Consultants, Inc. Technical documentation for the brief may be obtained by calling Edith McArthur on (202)219-1442. For more information on the NHES, contact Kathryn Chandler, NCES on (202)219-1767.

NCES 95-742

* U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1995-395-456